



IN THE SHADOW OF NO TOWERS

art spiegelman



004 Current Affairs

978-0-375-42307-9

52995

clogged drain, running late for an appointment—send me into a sky-is-falling tizzy. It's a trait that can leave one ill-equipped for coping with the sky when it actually falls. Before 9/11 my traumas were all more or less self-inflicted, but outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center left me reel—

on that faultline where World History and

Personal History collide—the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed.

It took a long time to put the burning towers behind me. Personal history aside, ship codes seemed to have something to do with the intensity of response. Long after uptown New Yorkers resumed their daily jogging in Central Park, those of us living in Lower Manhattan found our neighborhood transformed into one of those suburban gated communities as we flashed IDs at the police barriers on 14th Street before being allowed to walk home. Only when I trav-

eled to a university in the Midwest in early October

2001 did I realize that all New Yorkers were out of their minds compared to those for whom the attack was an abstraction. The assault on the Pentagon confirmed that the carnage in New York City was indeed an attack on America, not one more skirmish on foreign soil. Still, the small town I visited in Indiana—draped in flags that reminded me of the garlic one might put on a door to ward off vampires—was at least as worked up over a fratsuse's zoning violations as with threats from "raghead terrorists." It was as if I'd wandered into an inverted version of Saul Steinberg's famous map of America seen from Ninth Avenue, where the known world ends at the Hudson; in Indiana everything east of the Alleghenies was very, very far away.

One of my near-death realizations as the dust first settled on Canal Street was the depth of my affection for the chaotic neighborhood that I can honestly call home. Allegiance to this melted nugget in the melting pot is as close as I comfortably go to patriotism. I wasn't able to imagine myself leaving my city for safety in, say, the south of France, then opening my *erald Tribune* at some café to read that New York City had been turned into radioactive rubble. The realization that I'm usually a "rooted" cosmopolitan is referred to in the fourth of *No Towers* comix pages that follow, but the unstated company that underlies all the pages is only implied: I made a vow that morning to return to making comix full-time despite the fact that comix can be so damn labor intensive that one has to assume that one will live forever to make them.



had happened that would have done a Frenchman proud. (My susceptibility for conspiracy goes back a long ways but had reached its previous peak after the 2000 elections.) Only when I heard paranoid Arab Americans blaming it all on the Jews did I reel myself back in, deciding it wasn't essential to know precisely how much my "leaders" knew about the hijackings in advance—it was sufficient that they immediately instrumentalized the attack for their own agenda. While I was going off the deep end in my studio, my wife, Françoise, was out impersonating Joan of Arc—finding temporary shelter for Tribeca friends who'd been rendered homeless, sneaking into the cordoned-off areas to bring water to rescue workers and even, as art editor of *The New Yorker*, managing to wrest a cover image from me, a black-on-black afterimage of the towers published six days after the attack.

I'd spent much of the decade before the millennium trying to avoid making comix, but from some time in 2002 till September 2003 I devoted myself to what became a series of ten large-scale pages about September 11 and its aftermath. It was originally going to be a weekly series, but many of the pages took me at least five weeks to complete, so I missed even my monthly deadlines. (How did the newspaper cartoonists of the early twentieth century manage it? Was there amphetamine in Hearst's water coolers?) I'd gotten used to channeling my modest skills into writing essays and drawing covers for *The New Yorker*. Like some farmer being paid to not grow wheat, I reaped the greater rewards that came from letting my aptitude for combining the two disciplines lie fallow.

A restlessness with *The New Yorker* that predated 9/11 grew as the magazine settled back down long before I could. I wanted to make comix—after all, disaster is my muse!—but the magazine's complacent tone didn't seem conducive to communicating hysterical fear and panic. At the beginning of 2002, while I was still taking notes toward a strip, I got a fortuitous offer to do a series of pages on any topic I liked from my friend Michael Naumann, who had recently become the editor and publisher of Germany's weekly broadsheet newspaper, *Die Zeit*. It allowed me to retain my rights in other languages and came complete with a promise of no editorial interference—an offer no cartoonist in his right mind could refuse. Even one in his wrong mind.

The giant scale of the color newsprint pages seemed perfect for oversized skyscrapers and outsized events, and the idea of

conviction that I might not live long enough to see them published. I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I'd experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw, and the collagelike nature of a newspaper page encouraged my impulse to juxtapose my fragmentary thoughts in different styles.

The pivotal image from my 9/11 morning—one that didn't get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids several years later—was the image of the looming north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized. I repeatedly tried to paint this with humiliating results but eventually came close to capturing the vision of disintegration digitally on my computer. I managed to place some sequences of my most vivid memories around that central image but never got to draw others.

I'd hoped to draw the harrowing drive through a panicked city to retrieve our then-nine-year-old son, Dash, from the United Nations School that we thought a likely target that morning and, once we were all reunited, my breaking down in tears that shook my kids up far more than the events that precipitated my sobs.

I intended to do a sequence about my daughter, Nadja, being told to dress in red, white and blue on her first day at the Brooklyn high school she was transferred to while her school in Ground Zero was being used as a triage center. I forbade her to go, ranting that I hadn't raised my daughter to become a goddamn flag; she placated me by explaining she had the perfect jumper for the occasion.

I planned a "terror sex" sequence about the rumors of women patriotically rushing into the wreckage to give comfort to rescue workers at night and noted one Tribeca bachelor friend's wistful observation that those first days were "a really great time for picking up girls." (I responded that I couldn't imagine anything more deflating than those two 110-story towers collapsing.)

I had anticipated that the shadows of the towers might fade while I was slowly sorting through my grief and putting it into boxes. I hadn't anticipated that the hijackings of September 11 would themselves be hijacked by the Bush cabal that reduced it all to a war recruitment poster. At first, Ground Zero had marked a Year Zero as well. Idealistic peace signs and flower shrines briefly flourished at Union Square, the checkpoint between lower Manhattan and the rest of the city. That was all washed away by the rains and the police as the world hustled forward into our "New Normal." When the government began to move into full dystopian Big Brother mode and hurtle America into a colonialist adventure in Iraq—while doing very little to make America genuinely safer beyond confiscating nail clippers at airports—all the rage I'd suppressed after the 2000 election, all the paranoia I'd barely managed to squelch immediately after 9/11, returned with a vengeance. New traumas began competing with still-fresh wounds and the nature of my project began to mutate.

respond to transient events while they're happening. (It took me 13 years to grapple with World War II in *Maus*!) Besides, nothing has a shorter shelf-life than angry caricatures of politicians, and I'd often harbored notions of working for posterity—notions that seemed absurd after being reminded how ephemeral even skyscrapers and democratic institutions are.

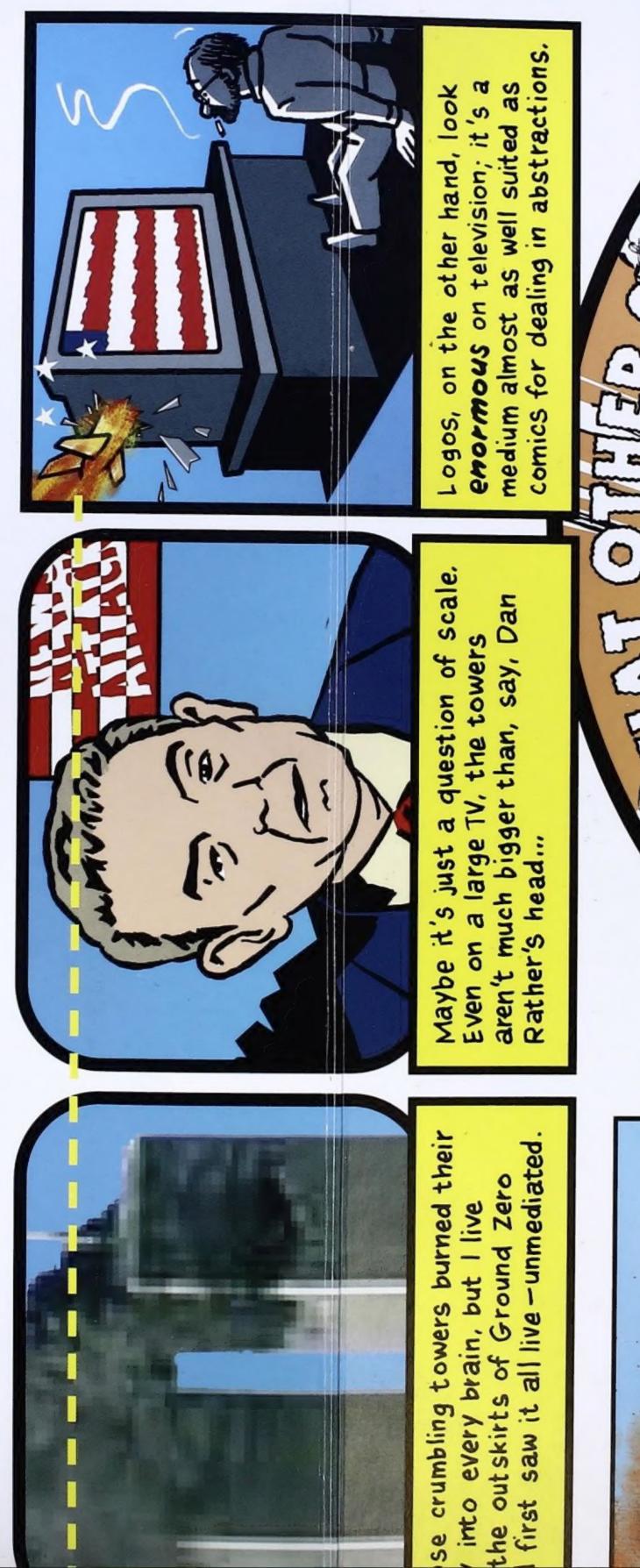
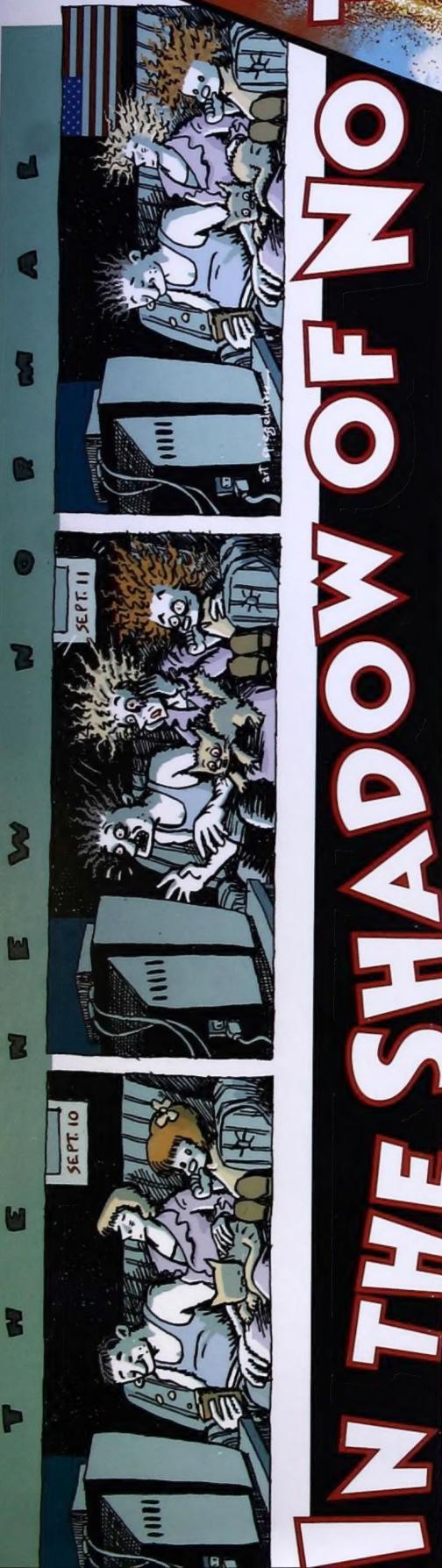
As the series got rolling I found my own "coalition of the willing" to publish it along with *Die Zeit*. Most of the distinguished newspapers and magazines that found a way to accommodate the large format, quirky content and erratic schedule were in the "old Europe"—France, Italy, the Netherlands, England—where my political views hardly seemed extreme. The concept of an overtly partisan press has a lot to recommend it. In America, my reception was decidedly less enthusiastic. Outside the left-leaning alternative press, mainstream publications that had actively solicited work from me (including the *New York Review of Books* and the *New York Times* as well as *The New Yorker*) fled when I offered these pages or excerpts from the series. Only the weekly *Forward*, a small-circulation English-language vestige of the once-proud daily Yiddish broadsheet, enlisted and ran them all prominently. I pointed out to the *Forward*'s editor that my pages, unlike the *Maus* pages that they'd once serialized, wouldn't have much specifically Jewish content. Offering me the Right of Return, he shrugged and said, "It's okay—you're Jewish."

The climate of discourse in America shifted dramatically just as I concluded the series. What was once unsayable now began to appear outside the marginalized alternative press and late-night cable comedy shows. A profile of me in the Arts section of the *New York Times* in the fall of 2003 even included the very panel of me feeling "equally terrorized" by al-Qaeda and by my own government that had made some editors visibly shudder two years earlier. *Sigh!* It's hard to be an artist who's consistently Seconds Ahead of His Time.

What changed? Basically, America entered its pre-election political season. Free debate is expected as proof of Democracy in action. And though it has been an enormous relief to hear urgent issues get an airing again, I was disappointed that vigorous criticism had been staved off until it could be contained as part of our business as usual. The feelings of dislocation reflected in these *No Towers* pages arose in part from the lack of outcry against the outrages while they were being committed.

Still, time keeps flying and even the New Normal gets old. My strips are now a slow-motion diary of what I experienced while seeking some provisional equanimity—though three years later I'm still ready to lose it all at the mere drop of a hat or a dirty bomb. I still believe the world is ending, but I concede that it seems to be ending more slowly than I once thought... so I figured I'd make a book.

art spiegelman nyc. Feb 16, 2004



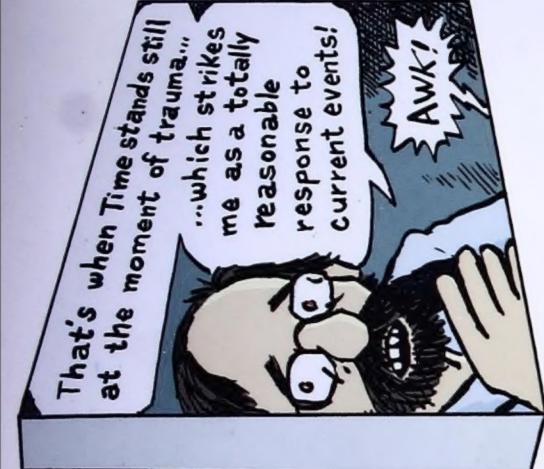
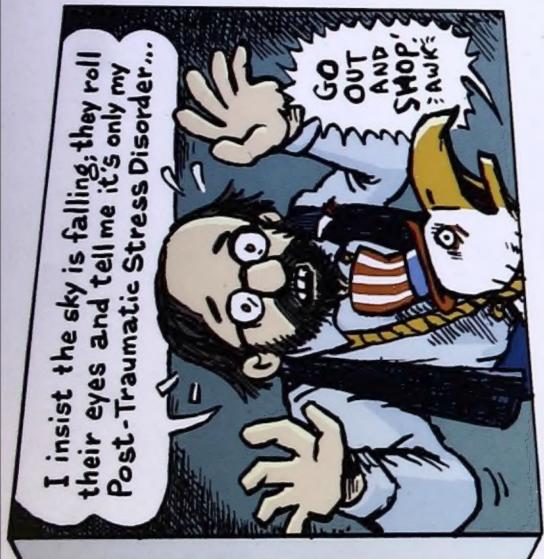
was sure we were going to die! I've always sorta suspected it, but that morning really convinced me..."

JAHAD
BRAND FOOTWARE®
All manmade materials.
(Extra-large sizes only.)

Available in finer shops near you!

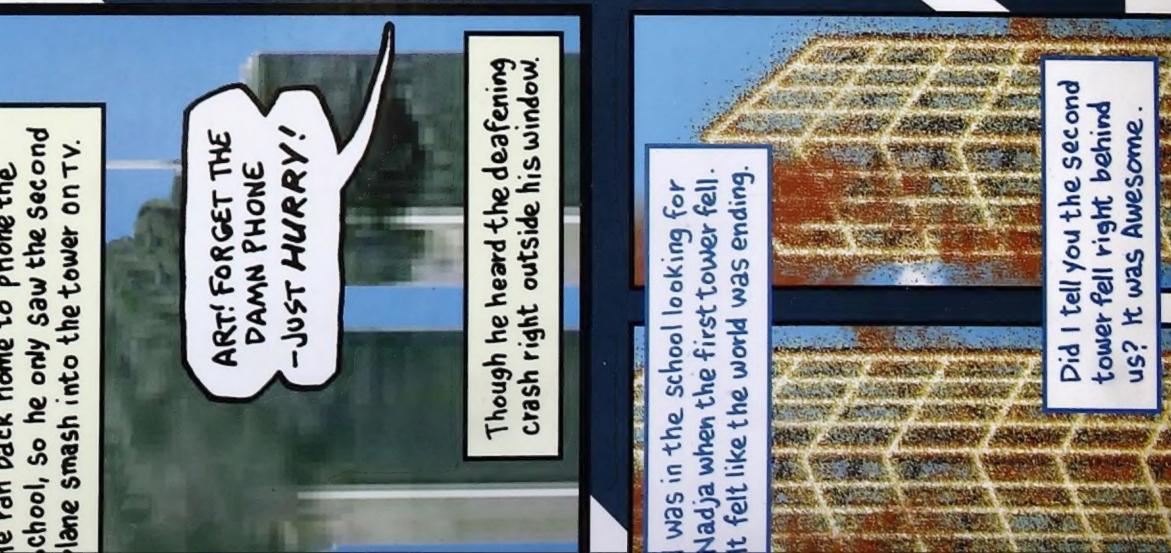
(9/11/01-2/15/02
© art spiegelman—2002

...but I'd feel like a jerk if a new disaster strikes while I'm sipping away at the l...

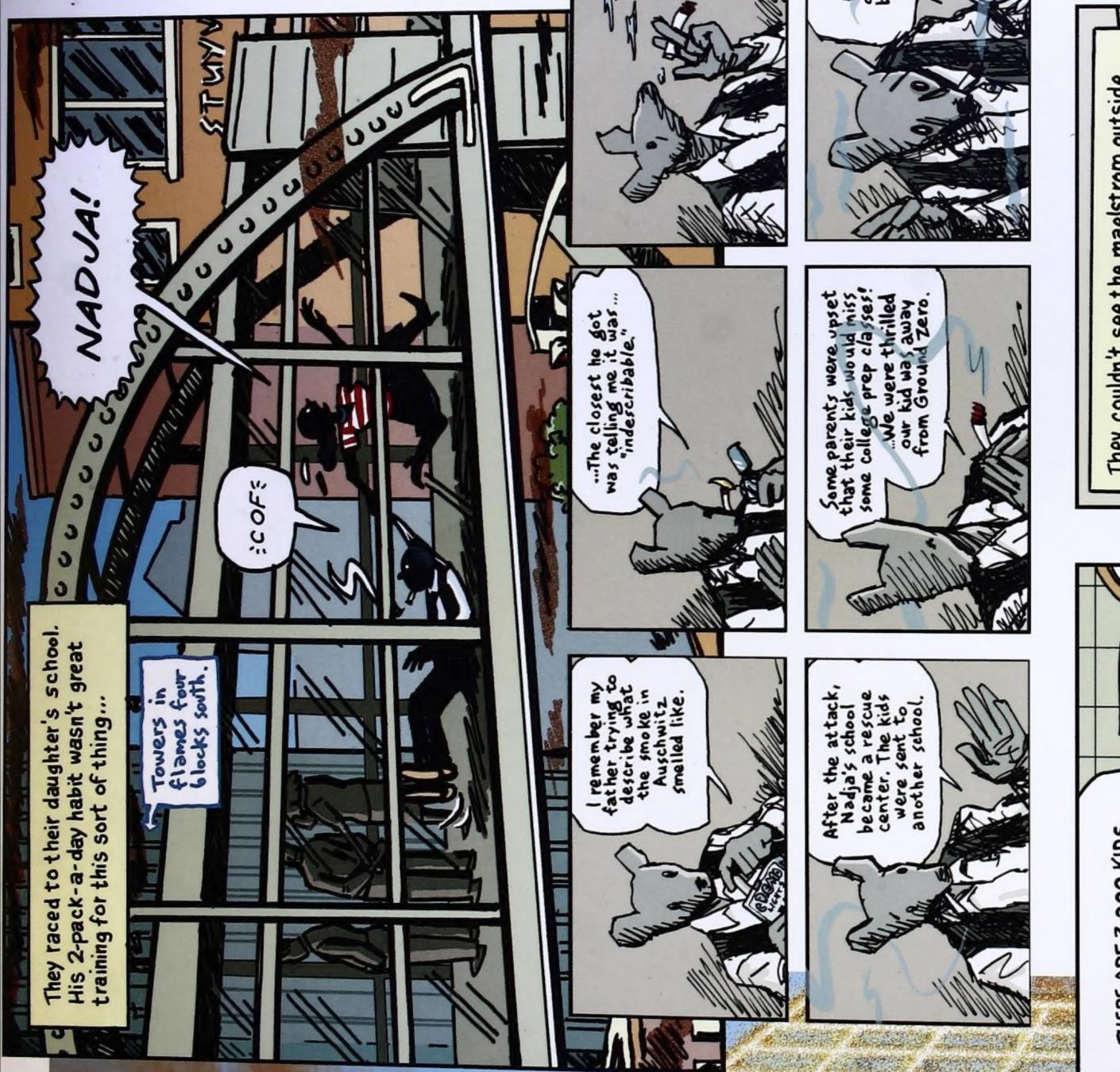


EQUALLY TERRORIZED BY AL-QAEDA AND BY HIS OWN GOVERNMENT...

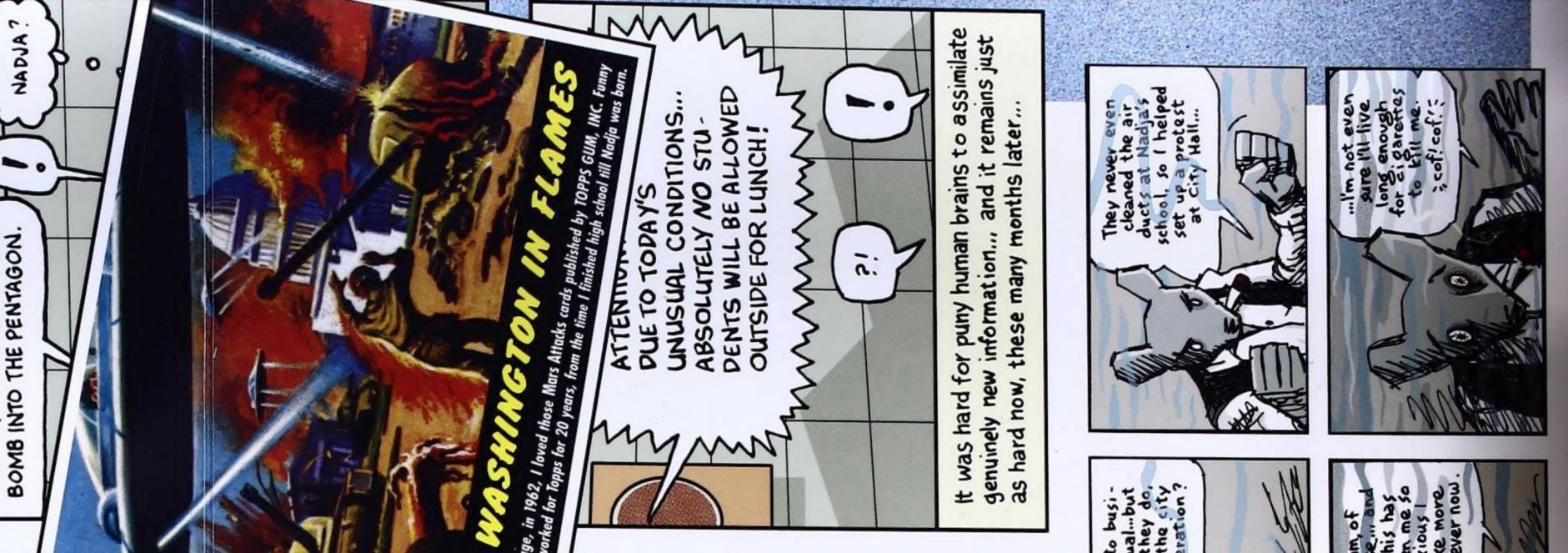
Our Hero looks over some ancient comics pages instead of working. He dozes off and relives his ringside seat to that day's disaster yet again, trying to figure out what he actually saw...



They raced to their daughter's school.
His 2-pack-a-day habit wasn't great
training for this sort of thing...



Synopsis:
In our last episode, as you might remember, time stood still. (And maybe it's still, at least as well.) Last week the artist began describing his September series in September 1999 to get all told by judgment day...)



It was hard for puny human brains to assimilate genuinely new information... and it remains just as hard now, these many months later...

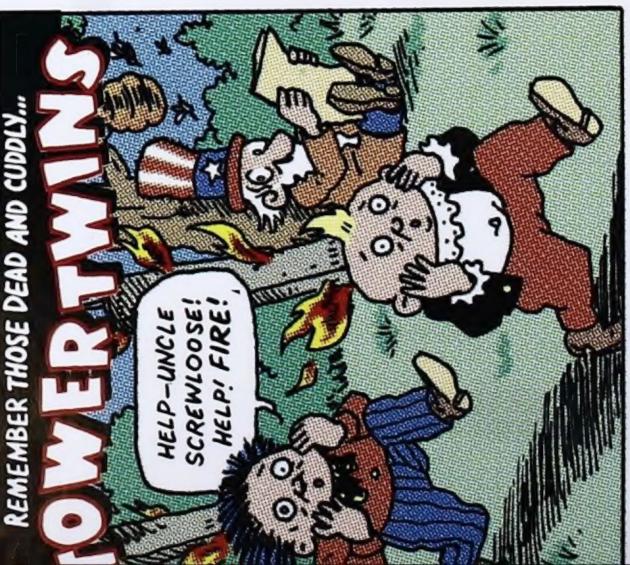
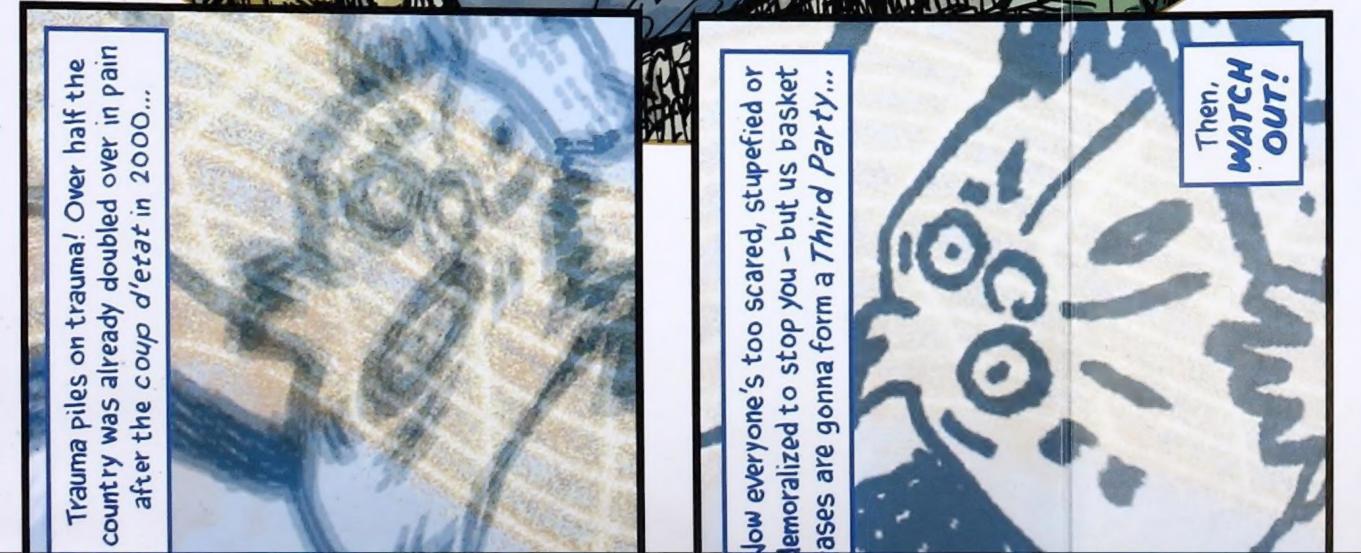
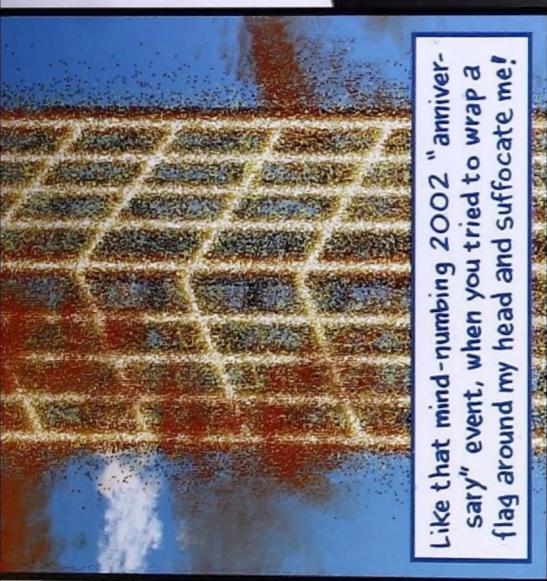
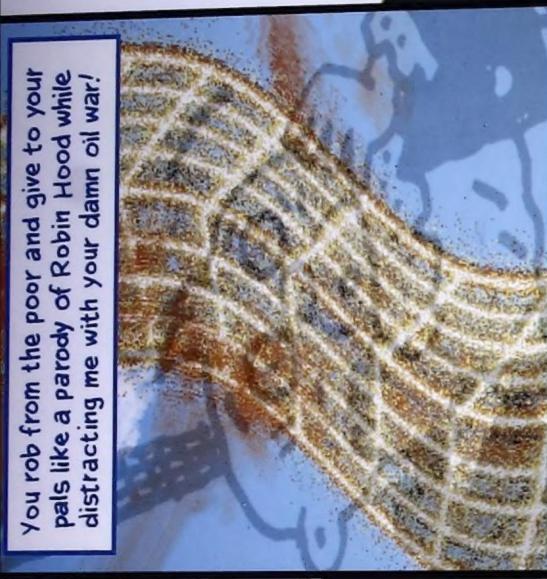


It was hard for puny human brains to assimilate genuinely new information... and it remains just as hard now, these many months later...

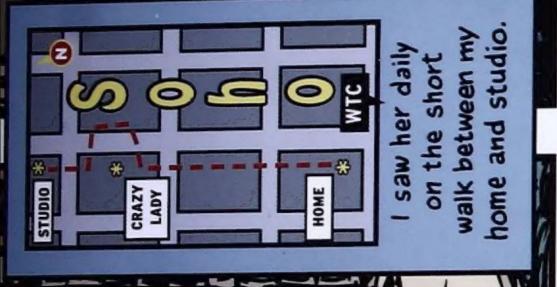


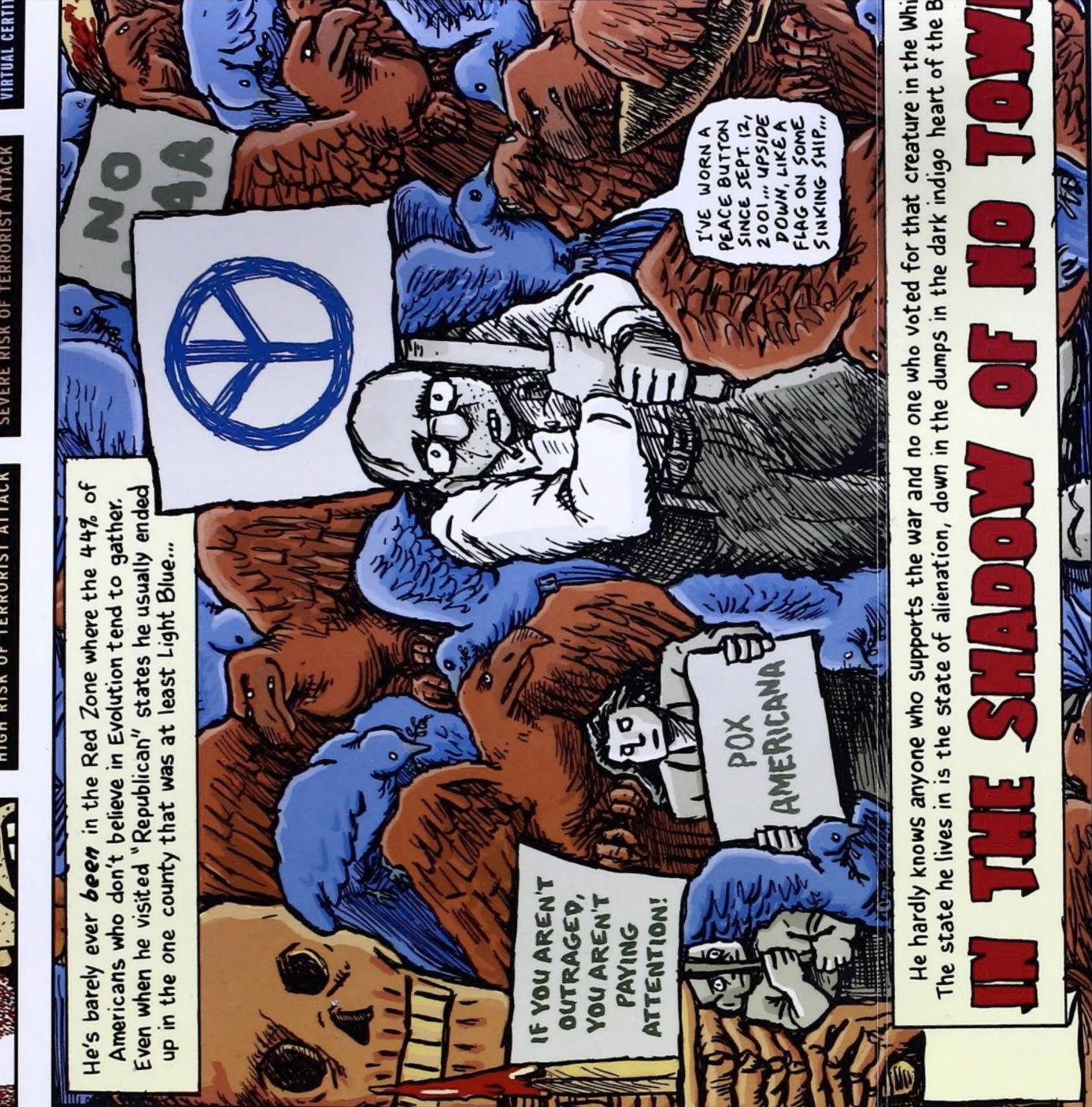
Leave me alone, Damn it! I'm just trying to comfortably relive my September 11 trauma but you keep interrupting—

You rob from the poor and give to your pals like a parody of Robin Hood while distracting me with your damn oil war!

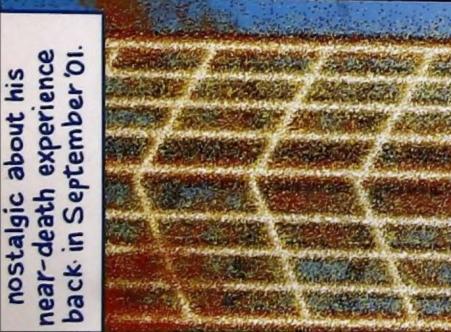
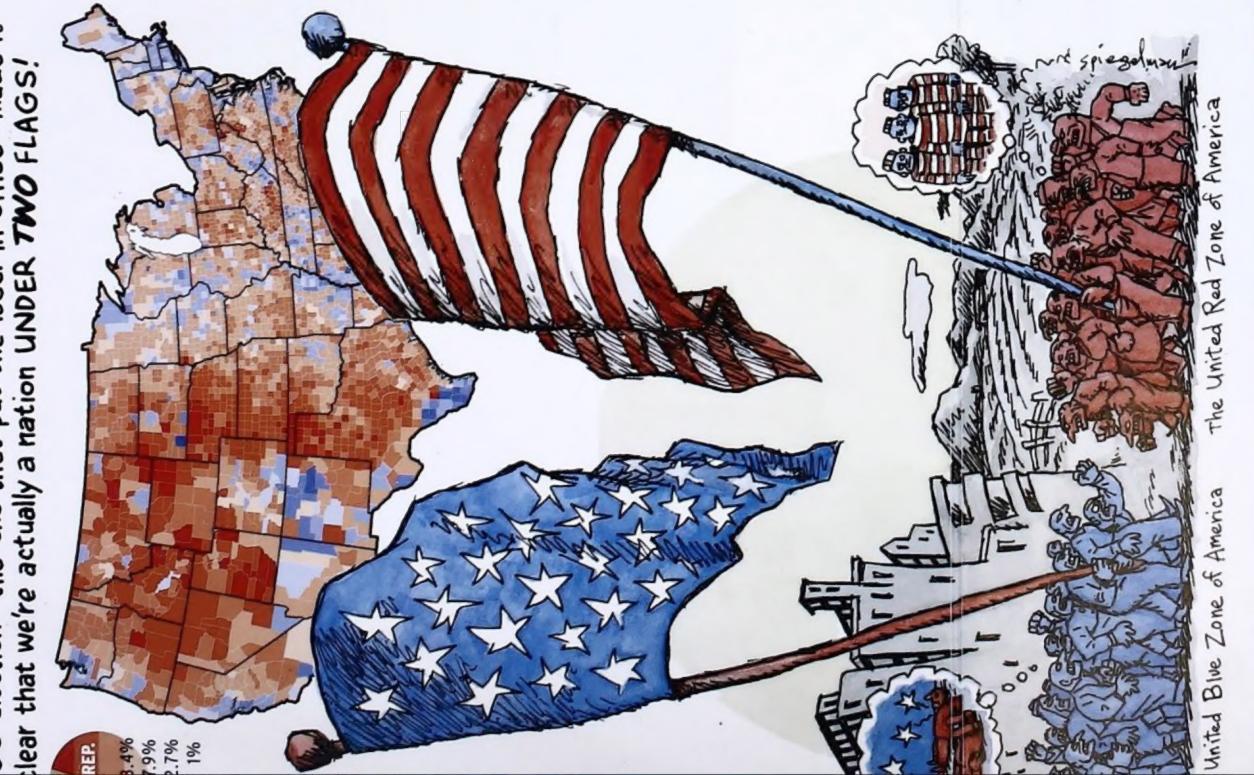


Even during the Giuliani years, when the homeless all magically "disappeared," I had my Crazy Lady...



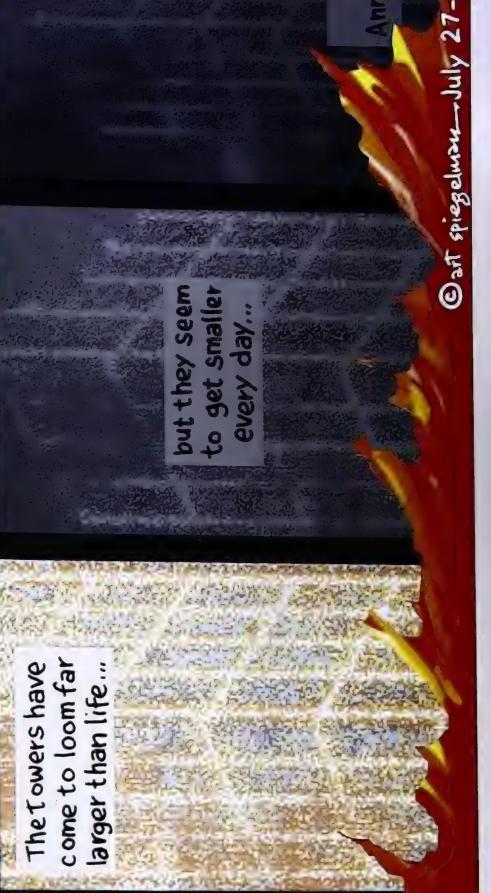
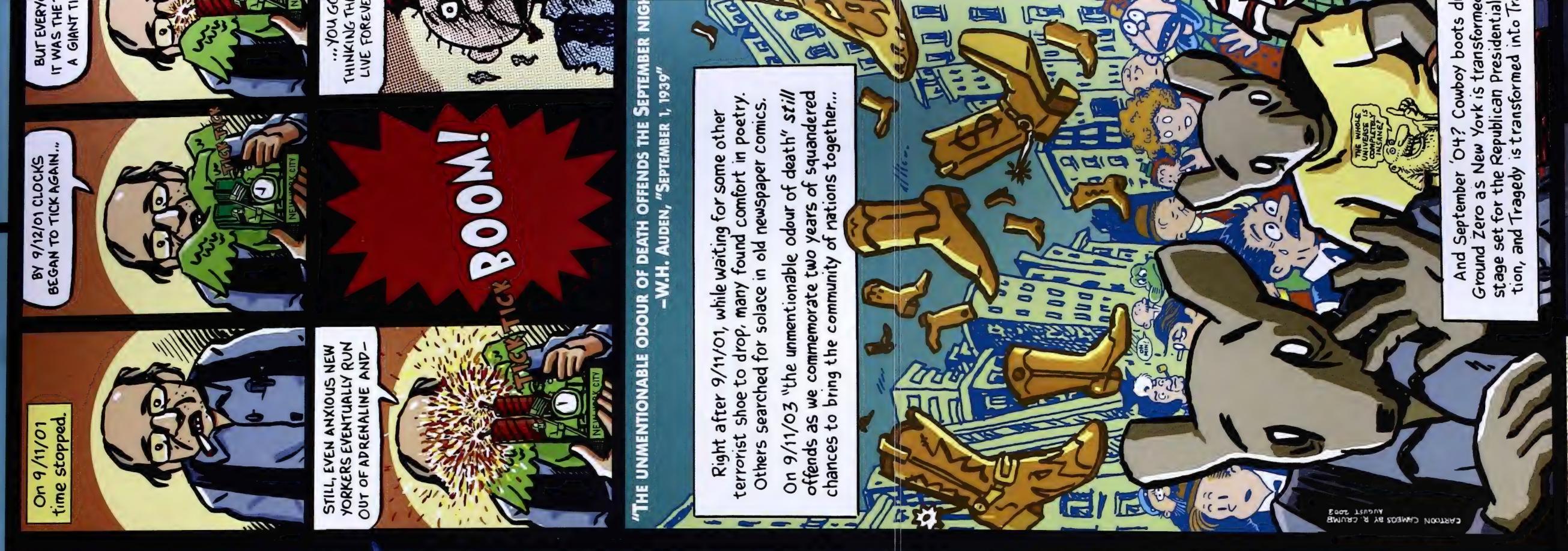
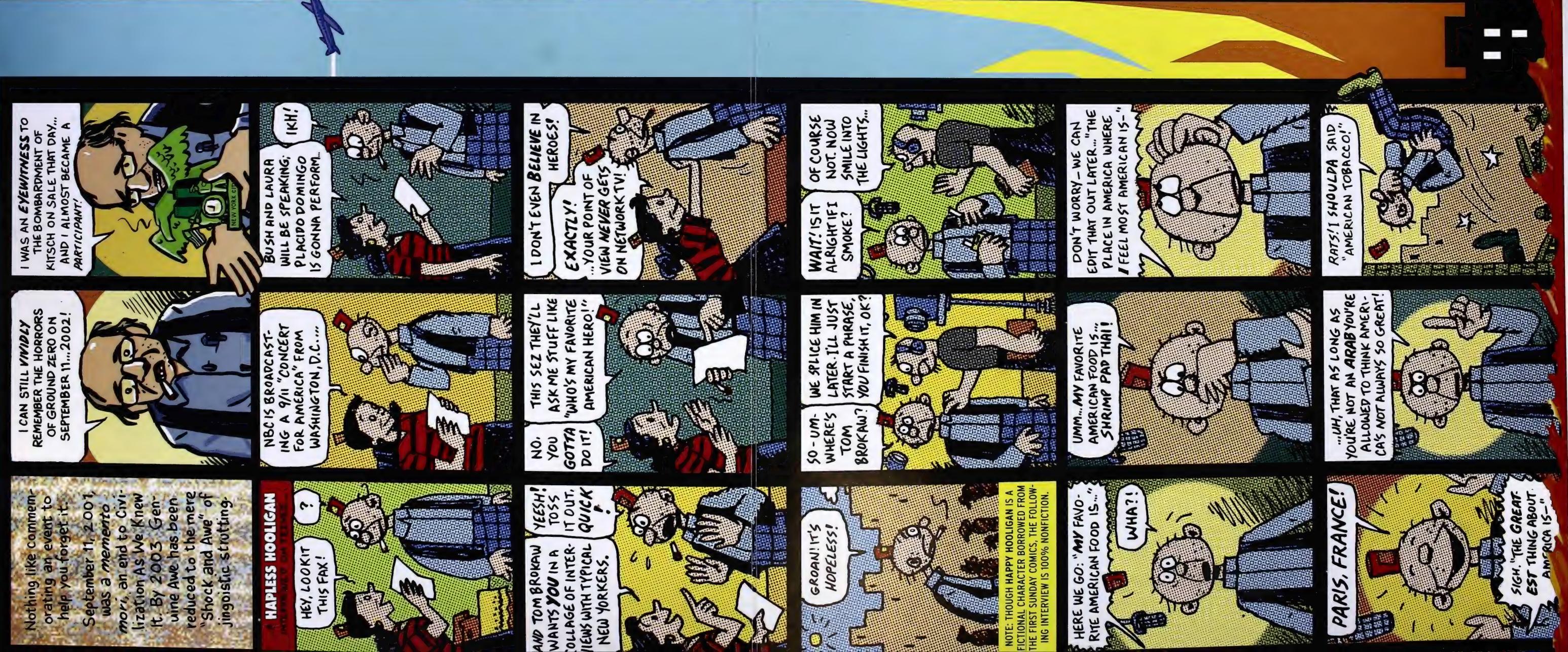


stars & stripes are a symbol of unity that many people see as a war banner. The detailed county-by-county map of the 2000 election—the one that put the loser in office—made it clear that we're actually a nation UNDER TWO FLAGS!











In Old Newspaper Days
—In the Shadow
of No Towers, #10

The Comic Supplement

Poetry readings seemed to be as frequent as the sound of police sirens in the wake of September 11, 2001. Workers needed poetry to lift their spirits, culture to their pain, culture to a wounded civilization. We have heard W.H. Auden's "September 11, 1939" a dozen times in the last year, but my mind kept wanting no solace in music of either—it seemed too exquisite. The only culturalists that could get past my flood of grief were old comic unpretentious ephemera from the mimetic dawn of the 20th century. At they were made with skill and verve but never last past the day they in the newspaper gave way; they were just right of-the-world moment.



"The blast that disintegrated those Lower Manhattan towers also disinterred the ghosts of some Sunday supplement stars born on nearby Park Row. They came back to haunt one denizen of the neighborhood, addled by all that's happened since." —In the Shadow of No Towers, #8

Hundred years and two blocks away from Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst titans of modern journalism, gave newspaper comic strip as a by-product of circulation war (a competition that led to war when their papers inflamed public what may well have been the accident of an American ship in Cuba). Their disavowing of the Spanish-American War—first colonialist adventure—would have news proud. Their sensationalism was now Journalism and its emblem was the America's first newspaper cartoon star.



Dedicated to edify the *New York World*'s often immigrant readership with full-color versions of the great masterpieces of world developed one of the first color newspaper for this purpose. The garish and off-register didn't up to the task, but the technology outline drawings with flat colors. So, in first Sunday color cartoon supplement world and elbowed out the High Art of the masses.

Our jaded 21st century eyeballs to gauge Pulitzer's exuberant splashes of color in gray type, but it was a Big Deal back then as well as figuratively—a 17"x23" on the nickel paper). One recurring feature in Outcault's *HOGAN'S ALLEY* [PLATE II] gang of street urchins in a Lower Manhattan ghetto. Like a cheerfully sociopathic Outcault drew scenes of political and

social commentary that teemed with brickbat violence, antic animal torture and the gleeful racism of the day. *Hogan's Alley* spotlighted one shanty-Irish guttersnipe in a bright yellow nightshirt, a Yellow Kid, whose popularity made him not just the comics' first star but also America's first hot licensing property. The whole enterprise gave Hearst a bad case of supplement-envy and in 1896 he unveiled a rival cartoon section in his *New York Journal*, starring...

When Dirks fled Hearst for Pulitzer in 1914, he continued his strip as *The Captain and the Kids*, while the original twins were masterfully cloned for Hearst by Harold Knerr, who drew the strip for decades under its original title. At the height of WWI's jingoistic fever, Knerr's characters were briefly rechristened *The Shenanigan Kids*, Mike and Alek, foreshadowing the recent American experiment in vindictive euphemism that brought us "Freedom Fries." (Dirks' kids lost their accents during the war and tried to pass for Dutch.) In any case, the little terrorists may well be immortal, still limping along at 107 in a few 21st century newspapers.

The Katzs inspired a gaggle of direct imitations and offshoots as well as spawning an entire medium. In one bland permutation, "Bunny" Schultze's *Foxy Grandpa* consistently foiled his two grandkids—marginally more socialized pranksters than Hans and Fritz—and made the comic supplement less anxiety-provoking for adults disturbed at seeing grown-ups regularly blown up. On one GLORIOUS FOURTH OF JULY in 1902 [PLATE IV] four cartoonists trapped in Hearst's bullpen collaborated to show Schultze's kids outdone by Dirks' Hans and Fritz: they dynamite Grandpa's patriotic reading of the Declaration of Independence. Injured in the explosion, Alphonse, one of the two pathologically polite Frenchmen created by Frederick Opper, explains to Gaston: "I detest the Fourth of July!" I tell you, some of those century-old crumbling newspaper pages seem like they were

emerging language of comics and served up a memorable cast of slapstick characters. The most unforgettable of his now almost forgotten strips was **HAPPY HOOLIGAN** [PLATE V], a Chaplinesque victim *avant le lettre*, whose tin-can hat was once as iconic as Chaplin's Derby. On August 27, 1911, the hapless hobo, described by Opper as "Misfortune's favorite son," trades his tin can for a turban to become Abdullah Hooligan, a dark-skinned circus clown who provokes his camel and gets tossed into...a tower of acrobats!

Hiring the highly respected Opper was a preemptive act on Hearst's part, designed to stave off the charges of vulgarity, violence and illiteracy that began to be leveled at the new comic supplements a second or two after they were born. Their cardinal sin was that they were *Sunday* supplements—the day kids ought to be in Sunday school studying the Bible, not yukking it up with semiliterate full-color lessons in mayhem. Still, the perpetual tug of war between vulgar and genteel culture in America has often been a fruitful one—generating New Orleans whorehouse jazz on the one hand and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* on the other.

The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, launched Lyonel Feininger's **KINDER KIDS** in 1906 [PLATE I] to appeal to its upscale German immigrant readers as a sophisticated antidote to the coarse Katzenjammers. Feininger's visually poetic formal concerns collided comically with the fishwrap disposability of newsprint, but his unamused editors pulled the plug on the project a few months later. The cartoonist, a New Yorker who had emigrated to Germany at sixteen and returned to safe harbor in America in 1937, became a celebrated second-generation cubist, one of the Bauhaus boys, but his handful of Sunday pages—testing the uncharted waters between the high and low arts, between European and American graphic traditions—remains his greatest aesthetic triumph.

The first decade of comics was the medium's Year Zero, that moment of open-ended possibility and giddy disorientation that inevitably gave way to the constraints that came as the form defined itself. One of the most exhilarating anomalies of that topsy-turvy moment was Gustave Verbeck's short-lived **UPSIDE DOWNS OF LITTLE LADY LOVEKINS AND OLD MAN MUFFAROO** [PLATE III]. A frighteningly ingenious experiment in compression, the first half of these strips magically becomes the second half when the reader turns the page 180 degrees. Twin

and white an eccentric artist like Verbeck could turn that structure on its head, Winsor McCay, the towering genius of the first decade of comics, drew monumental structures designed to last. A signifi-

Nemo and the funnies' move to the bourgeois suburbs in an early strip of his own, *Nibsy the Newsboy*, about a streetwise slum kid who gets dragged off to "Funny Fairyland." McManus then resumed his own long-term project: bringing sitcom domestic comedy to the comics, an undertaking that culminated in his classic **BRINGING UP FATHER** [PLATE VII]. Usually focused on marital and class strife—Maggie, a *nouveau riche* shrew, tries to drag her lottery-winning papa of a husband, Jiggs, up the social ladder—this episode takes place in a dreamland where cartoon characters can keep towers from tumbling.

But it was **KRAZY KAT** that hit me hardest. George Herriman's Kat-Pupp-Mouse love triangle has been universally celebrated as the jewel in the dunces cap of my art-form; and for once, I'm comfortable going with the crowd, one that has included cultural arbiters like e.e. cummings and Umberto Eco. There have been many "one-note" strips in the history of comics—Winsor McCay's short-lived *Little Sammy Sneeze*, about a tyke whose powerful sneezes knock over everything from a pushcart to, eventually, a whole city, comes to mind—but never anything like *Krazy Kat*: the lyrical and idiosyncratic Deco-doodle-style strip featured a Kat who loves getting "beaned by a brick" tossed almost daily by a malevolent mouse, Ignatz, who is then chased by one Offissa Pupp (a bulldog quietly in love with the Kat) who tosses the miscreant into a jail made of...bricks!

The strip's admirers could and did read Herriman's daily variations as anything from political allegory

(Mouse as Anarchist, Kat as Fascist, Kat as the elusive spirit of Democracy) to psychosexual drama (Mouse as Ego, Kat as Superego and Kat as untrammeled Id). But the ineffable beauty of *Krazy Kat* was that it was simply about a Kat getting bonked with a brick. It presented an open-ended metaphor that could contain all stories simultaneously; and after September 11, Ignatz started looking a lot like Osama Bin Laden to me!

One silent page from 1936 shows Krazy caterwauling in the ever-shifting desert-scape of Coconino County. Kat is joined by Kop for a duet, then by Mrs. Kwak Wak for a trio. A forlorn note tumbles into the panel and, after conferring, they all realize that they have no choice but to join Ignatz in his cell for a quartet. This is deep stuff, and after the attack it hit me like a ton of bricks: it proposed that since every Eden has its snake, one must somehow learn to live in harmony with that snake! I'm still working on it.



cant early innovator of the animated cartoon form as well as comics, McCay excelled in giving shape to our dream lives, as concrete in his renderings as Feininger was abstract. In his instantly popular **LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND** [PLATE VI], which began in the *New York Herald* at the end of 1905, we've traveled a long way from Hogan's Alley. Nemo, a young boy from a well-heeled family, journeyed nightly to a dreamland of baroque architecture and circus pageantry to hang out with King Morpheus' daughter before waking up, usually distressed, in the last small panel. Changes in scale (of panels as well as everything else), figures flying and falling and the real-world fantasy architecture of McCay's beloved New York City dominated the stunning weekly pages.

In our September 29, 1907, example an outsized Nemo and his companion, a Jungle Imp, are lost in the canyons of Lower Manhattan, and make their way to the South Street piers along the East River. A

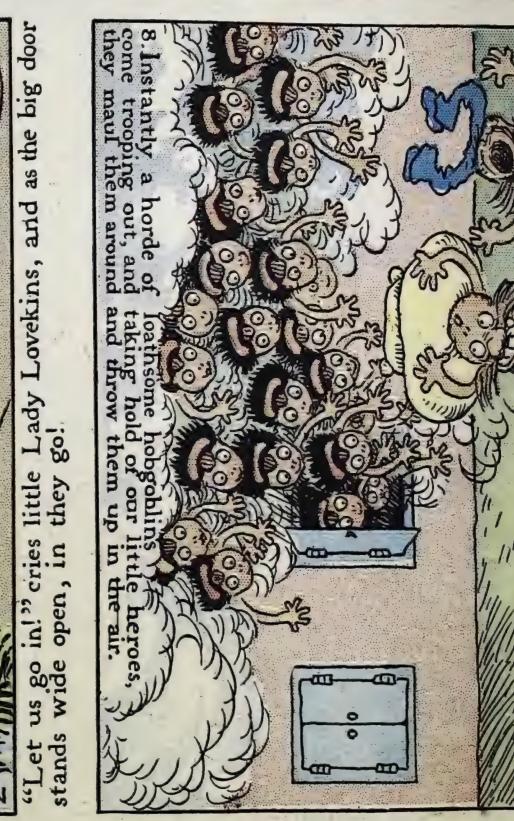
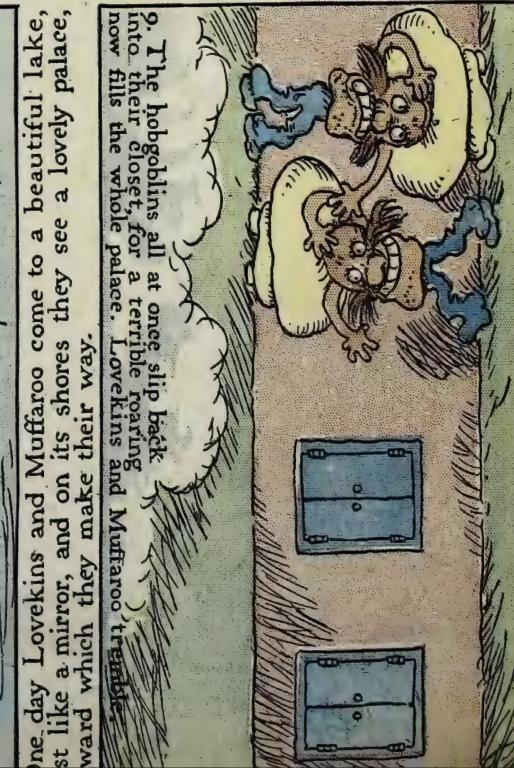
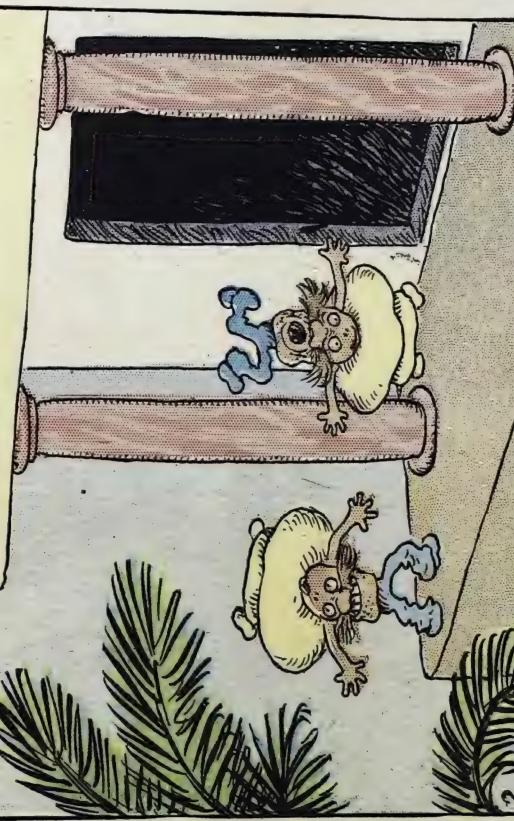
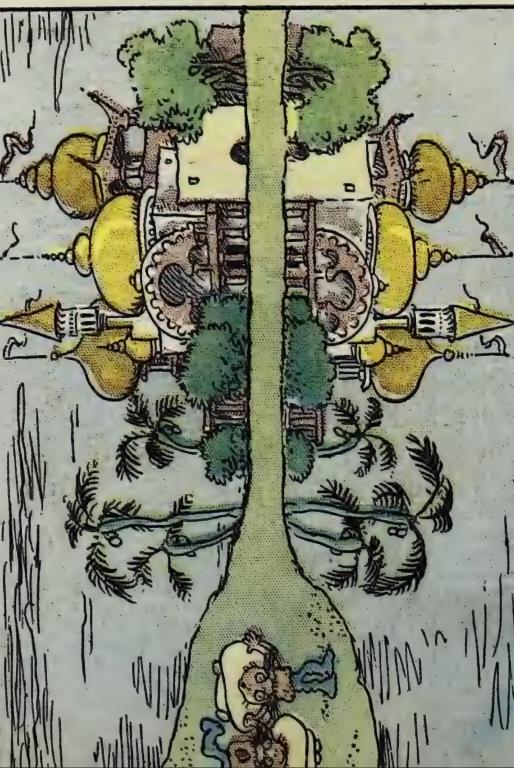
Triumphant departure of the kids, in the rainy basement.





PLATE II

THE UPSIDE-DOWNS OF LITTLE LADY LOVEKINS AND OLD MAN MUFFAROO • THE FAIRY PALACE.



"Let us go in!" cries little Lady Lovekins, and as the big door stands wide open, in they go!

"Lady Lovekins tosses them right through the door, onto the branches of a palm-tree outside."

"One day Lovekins and Muffaroo come to a beautiful lake, just like a mirror, and on its shores they see a lovely palace, and run away. Lovekins, more frightened than hurt, runs away, toward which they make their way."

"Now this is the whole palace. Lovekins and Muffaroo, tremble! The bogoblins all around you, slip back into the wretched hole again, and throw them up in the air."

"Then he vanishes, and pretty soon they find the two mysterious closets. Muffaroo remembers the Genie's words. 'How do you do, fairies?' Muffaroo calls out."

"The fairies go back, and Muffaroo closes the door on a tiny peep."

(COPRIGHT, 1904, BY THE NEW YORK HERALD CO.)

6 "I wonder what is in the other closet," says Lovekins.

"Ah, that we shall never know!" replies Old Man Muffaroo.

PLATE III

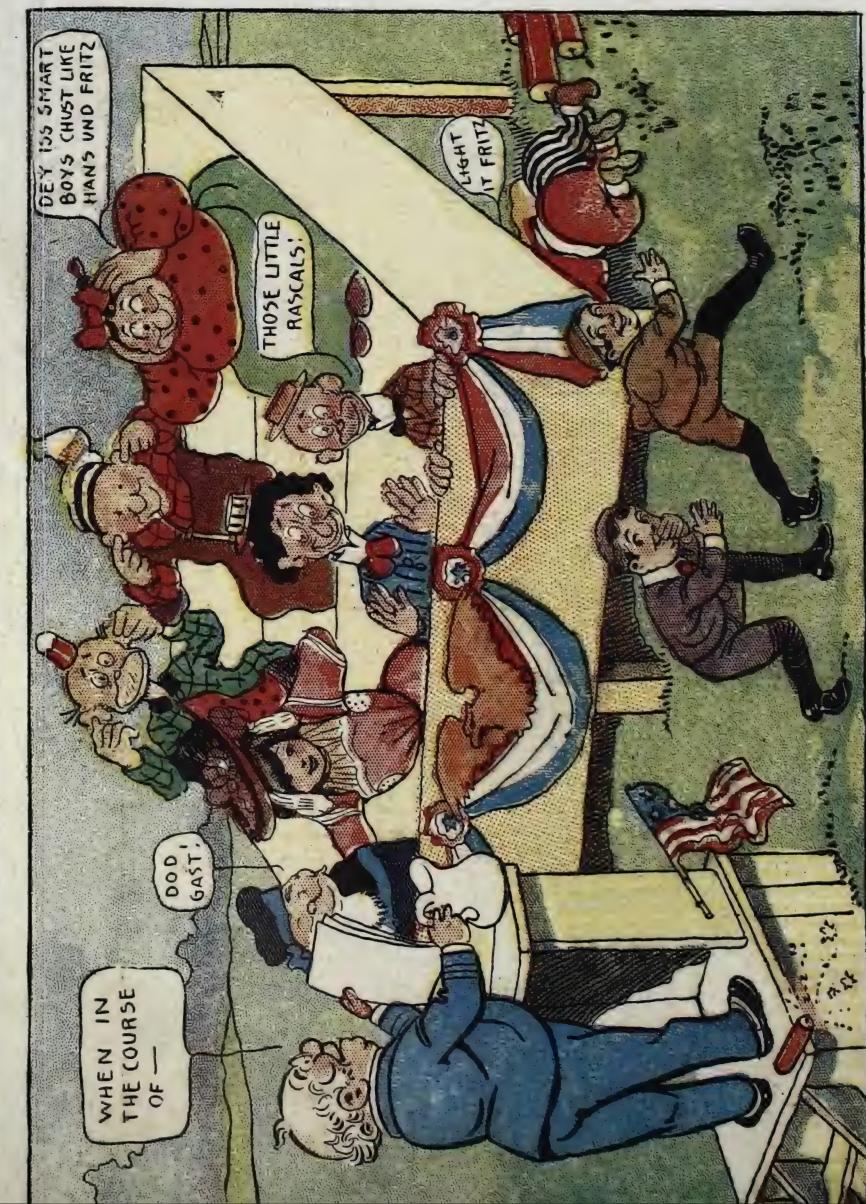
COMIC SUPPLEMENT
OF THE
**NEW YORK
AMERICAN**

JUNE 29th 1902.

COPYRIGHT 1902 BY W. R. HEARST.

The Glorious Fourth of July!

How Foxy Grandpa Began to Read the Declaration of Independence, and How He Was Interrupted



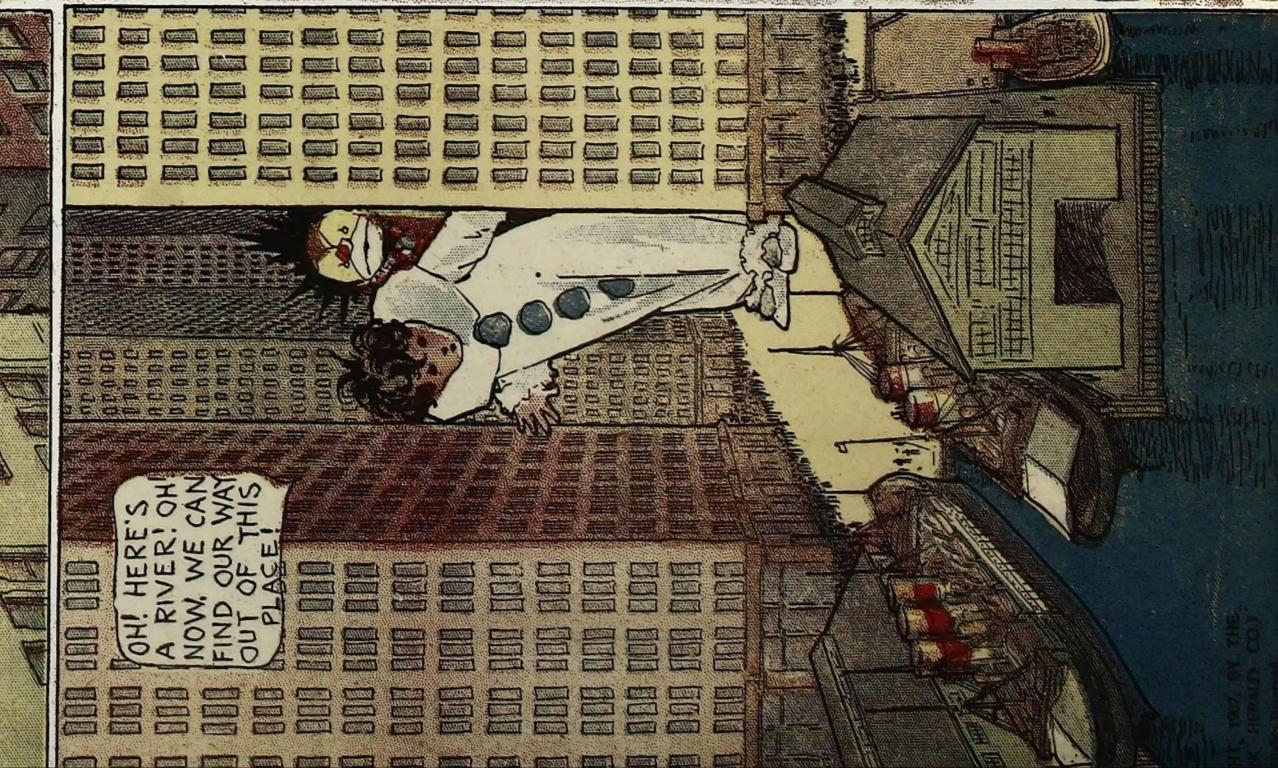
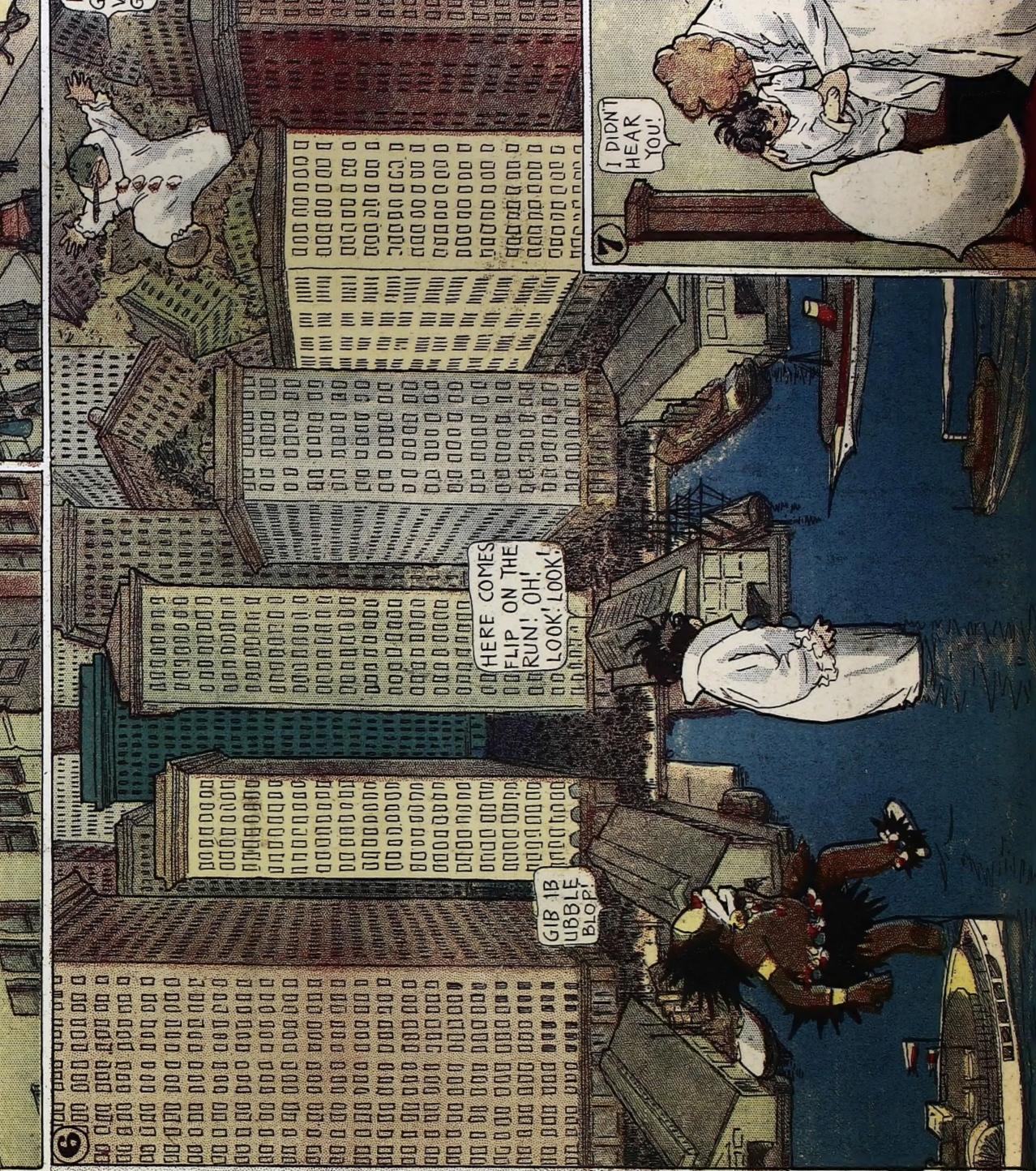
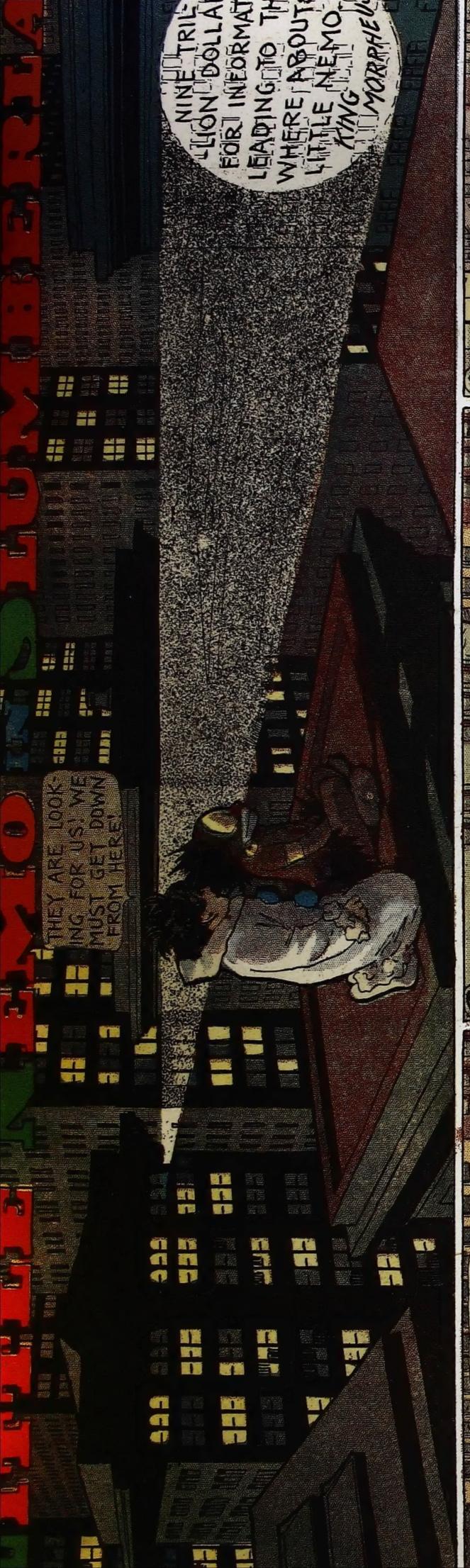
Comic Section of the New York American.

August 27, 1911

Is This Abdullah, the Arab Chief?

No. Gwendolin, It's Our Old Friend Happy Hooligan!





BEGIN EACH DAY WITH FA
“BRINGING UP FA
APPEARS EVERY
IN THE NEW YORK AME

Copyright 1921, by International Feature Service,
Great Britain Right Reserved. Registered U. S. Patent

Bringing Up Father

